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In Focus



As the centenary of a stylish yet spiritual, erudite yet emotive musical legend called GNB, who captured the imagination of thousands when he was alive and continues to influence many more after his death, draws to a close, Shanmukha celebrates his spirit with five articles. A. Seshan, a seasoned rasika, has penned his tribute, culled from his experiences and decades of observation of the musical scene. An article written by GNB's eldest son for a souvenir published on the occasion of his 75th birthday celebrations is reproduced to provide a glimpse of his family life. Sakuntala Narasimhan and P. Vasanth Kumar also write on their personal experiences and impressions of the musician. Sriram Gangadharan, a prominent musician of the present generation, recounts the life-changing impact of his music.

Ganga Ramachandran profiles a prolific composer from Kerala, Ennapadam Venkitarama Bhagavata, whose life exemplifies the therapeutic effects of music which T.V. Sairam researches in another article Music Therapy: Indian Medico's Perception. The universality of music and dance is emphasized by the veteran dancer V.P. Dhananjayan in his interview with Jyothi Mohan, while the scientific nature of music is analyzed in a very illuminating essay by P.H. Thyagaraju. Danseuse Geetha Radhakrishna finds yet another channel for her creativity through her poems on dance. A roundup of events at the sabha and the vidyalaya complete this issue. □

GNB – A CENTENNIAL TRIBUTE

by A. Seshan

Today the fine arts field in the South is characterised by many talented music and dance artistes who are well-qualified educationally. It is not unusual to see graduates and post-graduates in information technology, physics and mathematics, chartered accountants and even medical doctors taking to music and dance. The forerunner of this trend was G. N. Balasubramaniam, popularly known as GNB, whose birth centenary is being observed all over the Carnatic music world here and abroad. He was born on January 6, 1910. He died at the young age of 55 in 1965 when he was at the top in his profession. His debut marked the arrival of the university-educated artiste in the Carnatic music world although it took many years after him for it to become a trend. It was a novelty in those days. Vidwans and vidushis of olden times were no doubt well-educated informally even though they did not attend any college. Often they learnt not only music but languages like Sanskrit and Telugu also from their parents and gurus with emphasis on pronunciation and the understanding of the meanings of the songs. It was considered sufficient for making a living in their profession. Some of them like Mudicondan Venkatarama Iyer wrote scholarly articles for professional journals that have become standard sources of reference. The general attitude was that university education produced only clerks for the British colonial administration to rule India. It was true of the North also. I have heard on good authority that when Ahmed Jan Thirakwa,



GNB in concert with Lalgudi Jayaraman on the Violin and Palghat Raghu on the Mrudangam

the great master of tabla, performed in the then All India Radio (AIR), he acknowledged the receipt of remuneration by stamping his thumb impression as he could not sign his name. He had spent his entire life on only learning and playing the tabla.

GNB's father G V Narayanaswami Iyer was a connoisseur of Carnatic music and was a host to many vidwans in his house. Thus GNB had good exposure to Carnatic music right from his childhood. His father had a high standing in society being the headmaster of the reputed Hindu High School in Triplicane in the then Madras. He wanted his son to become a lawyer. After completing the equivalent of post-graduate studies in English literature GNB decided to take to Carnatic music. He had training under Karur Chinnaswamy Iyer, Madurai Subramania Iyer and Tiger Varadachariar. He was unique among the leading vidwans of the time as one who did not undergo

the conventional gurukulavasam (staying with the teacher to learn music). His first performance was at Kapaleeswarar temple in Mylapore, Madras, in 1928. The musician originally booked to perform was Musiri Subramania Iyer. As he could not fulfil the engagement due to sickness GNB was invited to take over the stage. As luck would have it his guru Madurai Subramania Iyer provided the violin accompaniment to him. It was received well by the rasikas who recognised the arrival of a new star on the firmament. After that programme he never looked back.

GNB Bani

GNB ushered in the jet era in Carnatic music. The staid concert stage became the venue for fireworks in fast-paced brigas, a trend that many others had to follow to survive in the profession. During the prime of his career he could sing in all the three octaves and in all the three speeds. He was a fan of Hindustani music and admired Bal Gandharva and Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. His note-by-note or brick-by-brick build up of the raga was perhaps due to influence of badhat practised by Hindustani vidwans. His brigas could also have been the result of listening to the torrential tans of Bade Ghulam. He revelled in sangatis; some were his own. 'Darini' in Shuddha Saveri is a good example. He gave more importance to Tanam in Ragam, Tanam and Pallavi than many contemporary musicians devoting considerable time to it. He also sang one or two rare ragas in almost every concert. Some of those that became popular due to him were Chenchukambhoji (*Vararagalaya*), Deepakam (*Kalalanerchina*), Jayamanohari (*Yagnadulu*),

Margahindolam (*Chalamelara*) and Jayantasri (*Marugelara*). Veena maestro and my guru the late Devakottai Narayana Iyengar, who listened to my tape recording of the song 'Kalalanerchina', exclaimed, 'Buddhisali' ('intelligent man') referring to GNB and asked me to copy it for him. His 78rpm record containing *Radha Sametha Krishna* in Misra Yaman was a great hit and often featured in the Listeners' Requests programme of Akashvani. So was the case with his ragamalikai tukkadas like *Tikkuteriyadakattil* and *Sonnadai seidita sagasama*. Even those who were not interested in classical music attended his performances just to listen to the tukkadas.

D. N. Iyengar once told me that at the peak of his popularity GNB's drawing room was full of sabha secretaries waiting in a queue to book his concerts. Dwaram Venkataswami Naidu was a solo violinist but I heard him once accompanying GNB in Madurai. Such was the respect he commanded among his peers. GNB was among the first to support the Tamil Isai Movement, which was started by Raja Annamalai Chettiar, Kalki, T. K. Chidambara natha Mudaliar and others to popularise kritis in Tamil. Then the tendency for some of the leading sabhas was to tell the musicians to sing Tamil songs as tukkadas in the post-pallavi section as they considered that only the kritis of the Carnatic Music Trinity and their likes were worthy of being sung in the pre-pallavi section of the concerts. The very first year when he sang all Tamil songs at the Tamil Isai Sangam in Madras, he attracted more than a thousand people. According to GNB's son G. B. Rajasekhar, Palghat

Raghu mentioned to him that from 1936-1955, when he was one of the percussion accompanists for his concerts, he had played close to 2000 concerts.

GNB's approach to Carnatic music could best be summed up in his own words.

Writing on 'Karnatak Music' in a booklet brought out on the occasion of Radio Sangeet Sammelan, (November 10-15, 1955) GNB laid out his view on kala or tempo thus:

'In my opinion, it is the madhyama kala – and this is an important aspect of Karnatak music – which gives endless scope for improvisation and manodharma to the performer. The madhyama kala tempo of so many of our compositions and the style of most of our well-known musicians bear testimony to this fact. This by no means places the chowka kala at a discount. Beyond doubt the chowka kala songs and padams reflect the soul of our ragas. But experience has shown that chowka kalam is best enjoyed by audiences with cultivated taste. Its place is thus the chamber with a limited discriminating audience. My view is that the Karnataka bani should adequately provide for the three degrees of speed, the madhyama kalam getting the lion's share and the chowka kalam having just the minimum that would not tire.'

Although a great scholar well-versed in tala GNB did not engage in complicated rhythmic exercises. D. K. Pattammal recounted an interesting episode involving GNB that throws light on his approach in this regard (Sruti, August 2009). At a concert attended by GNB she sang a

Dhruva tala pallavi in sankeerna jati and two kalais. It was a complicated rhythmic combination of 9+2+9+9 or 29 beats in all. After the concert GNB congratulated her on the successful negotiation of the pallavi but expressed the view that she should not attempt such difficult tala structures as even a small distraction could play havoc.

Shruti Bhedam

With his higher education and composing abilities it was natural for GNB to have a cerebral approach to music. One result of this was his attempting graha bheda or shruti bheda. It means singing a raga and then shifting the tonic note (adhara shadja) to another swara and carrying on with the scale of the original raga but producing a different melody. Thus a swara bheda on rishabham, gandharam, madhyamam, dhaivatam and nishadam done on Todi would result in Kalyani, Harikambhoji, Natabhairavi, Shankarabharanam and Kharaharapriya, respectively. It requires concentration and expertise of a high order with reference to shrutis and swaras. Shruti bheda is like tight-rope walking. A slip can easily land the musician in the abyss of apaswaram.

There were many contemporary vidwans who did not like GNB's forays into a new field not traversed by them. In the past, senior musicians abhorred it on the ground that it was sinful or a dosham, probably because they could not attempt it! It is one of the many superstitions and folklores prevailing in our music system. There was a heated debate at the discussions of the Experts Group of the Music Academy in 1944 with both sides arguing out their cases. ("Sorting out shruti bheda", Sriram

Venkatkrishnan, The Hindu Friday Review, December 18, 2009) GNB was not present probably out of deference to his seniors. The debate lasted for two whole days but when put to vote, however, it was found that most of the scholars were against any formal decision by the Academy. The consensus was that it was an intellectual feat and was best left to competent artistes to perform. Perhaps GNB wanted to respect the feelings of his seniors opposed to the technique. Subsequently he resorted to it sparingly. I do not remember his doing shruti bhedam during his concerts in Mumbai in later years. But the technique was occasionally revived by his disciple M. L. Vasanthakumari. Attempting it even one way occasionally would testify to the virtuosity of the musician and should be encouraged. But the rasikas should be forewarned so that it is not misunderstood as being off-key. Among the Hindustani musicians I have heard Ustad Bismillah Khan doing shruti bhedam in playing ragas like Madhuvanti.

The above-mentioned discussion of the Music Academy appears to have limited itself to the production of other known ragas by moving the tonic note on the scale of one. There is another aspect of the technique. It is the creation of new ragas. At one of the experts' meeting at the Academy in the 1950s, Muthiah Bhagavata was singing in the course of a lecture demonstration. Tiger Varadachariar made his entry midway through the song. He is reported to have asked a vidwan sitting near him: "Why is this Brahmanan singing Malayamarutam without the rishabha?" He got the reply that Muthiah Bhagavata was

singing a new raga called Valaji which he had discovered by doing srutibhedam on the madhyamam of Abhogi. The swaras are sa ga pa dha ni sa. It is the equivalent of Kalavati in Hindustani music. His kriti *Jalandhara* in Valaji was often included by Madurai Mani Iyer in his concerts. This aspect of the discovery of new ragas through swarabhedam is important as could be seen in the next section.

GNB, the Vaggeyakara

A great vaggeyakara well-versed in Tamil, Sanskrit and Telugu, he never sang his own kritis in his concerts, as a matter of principle. I think he felt it would be taking advantage of a captive audience! The one exception he made was *Paramakripa sagari* in Yadukula kambhoji and Rupaka talam. He is reported to have composed 250 kritis in known and new ragas, published by now in three volumes. Such ragas as Amrita Behag, Shivashakti, Sarangatarangini, Chandrahasitam and Chayaranjani were discovered by him probably through swarabhedam. GNB was a Sri Vidya upasaka. According to a website the nine swaras (four in arohanam and five in avarohanam) of Shivashakti referred to the nine peethas of Srichakram; even the raga has nine alphabets. His swara gnana was tremendous which he had displayed right from his young age when he used to dissect the swaras behind the songs that he had heard in the concerts of other vidwans. Once he heard Bade Ghulam sing Gavati. He immediately grasped its lakshana. He had a concert the next day. While singing Vande Mataram, a sloka, in ragamalikai he introduced Gavati to the delight of the audience. As the Producer of

Music in Akashvani, Chennai, he used the raga to play the role of a filler between programmes. Later he composed a full-fledged varnam in the raga ('Kamala Vasini') that was sung by Radha and Jayalakshmi in the National Programme of Akashvani on March 13, 1962. He used to compose chittaswarams also that contributed to the popularity of such kritis like *Vararagalaya* in Chenchukambhoji.

According to Rajasekhar, GNB did not keep any records of his compositions but dictated them to his disciples with the notations and taught them also to sing them. He used to refer his creations to vidwans like T. N. Krishnan and S. Ramanathan and was open to suggestions for improvement.

GNB and Bade Ghulam Ali Khan

It was GNB who introduced the late Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan to the Chennai audience. It was also an introduction of classical Hindustani vocal music to Tamil Nadu. No doubt right from Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande in the modern era there had been others from the West and the North who had visited Tamil Nadu from time to time either for concerts or for interaction with the Carnatic music vidwans and musicologists. They had close relationships with such greats as Narayana Iyer (T. N. Krishnan's father) and Parur Sundaram Iyer (M. S. Gopalakrishnan's father). Abdul Karim Khan of Kirana gharana, who once scoffed at swaraprastara in Carnatic music calling it as lips playing on the harmonium, later came to use sargam exercises in his own concerts – a practice followed widely in many gharanas now. It was the result of

his spending some time in Chennai listening to Veenai Dhanammal. Pandit Ravi Shankar had also made a great impression on the public. But the average rasika was acquainted with only Hindi film songs, which were becoming a rage in the post-Independence years in Tamil Nadu (TN), and often the tunes were copied in Tamil movies in the absence of any law on intellectual property rights. I distinctly remember Roshanara Begum, the doyenne of the Kirana gharana at the top of the Hindustani classical music world then, giving a concert in the 1940s at the Setupati High School, my alma mater in Madurai, under the auspices of Sangeeta Samrakshana Sabha. The audience overflowed under the pandal in the quadrangle of the school with great expectations because movies like *Kismet* and *Ratan* were box-office hits then and their songs were being blared from street corners from gramophone record players. Although the common man did not understand Hindi he could appreciate the melody. Obviously the rasikas expected her to sing those songs. Lo and behold! The moment she started her khayal exposition the crowd melted like snow under the sun! It must have been a mortifying experience to the great lady who, however, carried on with her grand music unmindful of the small audience.

But the type of response to Hindustani vocal music in TN that we see today is due to Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. He was also exposed to Carnatic music thanks to GNB. He raised the level of thumri to a semi-classical stage by introducing sargams therein, probably due to the influence of

Carnatic music and the GNB connection. It is now a characteristic feature of the Punjab ang, which is kept alive by Ajoy Chakrabarti, the torch bearer of the Patiala gharana. GNB was so appreciative of his music that he publicly did a full-fledged shastanga namaskaram to the Ustad on the stage of a Chennai sabha. Many local musicians and rasikas objected to it on the ground that it belittled Carnatic music! The Ustad appreciated GNB's rendering of *Raga Sudharasa* in Andolika and learnt the raga from him.

GNB, the Movie Star

His attractive and charismatic personality caught the attention of the movie makers. In those days the hero and the heroine had to be good singers; the playback system was yet to be born. He acted in five movies, viz., *Bhama Vijayam* (1934), *Sathi Anasuya* (1937), *Sakunthalai* (1940), *Rukmangadan* (1946) and *Udayanan Vasavadatta* (1946). According to Randor Guy, a treasure house of tidbits on Tamil movies, the first one had as many as 59 songs! (The Hindu Friday Review, May 1, 2009), GNB sang eight of them. Unfortunately the related gramophone records (78 rpm) are not available. As Narada he sang compositions of Thyagaraja such as *Bala Kanakamaya* (Alana) and *Koti nadulu* (Todi) as duets with Lord Krishna, played by Maharajapuram Krishnamurthy, brother of Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer. GNB took on the role of Narada again in 'Sathi Anasuya'. The film had 37 songs of which GNB sang nine. It was not a success. GNB's final film 'Udayanan Vasavadatta' had an interesting background. The film featured M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar as the hero, and

singer-actress Vasundhara Devi, mother of Vyjayantimala, as the heroine. While the shooting was in progress Bhagavathar was arrested in connection with the Lakshmikantham murder case. GNB was brought in as a substitute for Bhagavathar. But the film bombed at the box office. With that GNB bade goodbye to cinema.

I remember seeing Sakuntalai and Udayanan Vasavadatta. The first one was dominated by MS and GNB had a subdued role. However, his duets with MS were popular along with the solos of the latter. According to GNB's biographers, T.S. Vedagiri, K.S. Muthuraman and K.S. Mahadevan, nagaswaram maestro Veerusami Pillai saw 'Sakunthalai' several times only to listen to GNB's Kambhoji and then walk out of the theatre. All that I remember of the second movie now is the beautiful dance of Kumari Kamala to the playback singing of D. K. Pattammal. The song was 'Kunchita padam ninaindurukum painkodi tanaik kan paarai iravu pakal' ['Look at this creeper pining for your kunchitapadam (raised back of the foot) day and night'] in Kambhoji composed by Papanasam Sivan.

GNB did receive adverse remarks from fellow musicians, particularly the accompanying artistes, for his acting in movies which they considered as infra dig. But other vidwans like Musiri Subramania Iyer and T. Chowdiah had also acted in movies. In any case the popularity of all these musicians with rasikas did not suffer in any way. But sabha establishments, run by crusty old gentlemen cast in a conservative mould, had their own prejudices and were reluctant to engage

him for concerts. Leading musicians boycotted his performances. But eventually the rasikas prevailed over all those objections that did nothing to diminish his popularity. It was, however, not an isolated case. Thus, even after he was hailed as the Thyagaraja of the 20th century, it took many years for Papanasam Sivan to be honoured with the Sangita Kalanidhi title of the Music Academy just because of his association with movies. Looking back how one wishes that we have more such composers making music for movies and musicians like GNB singing in them!

GNB, the Gentleman

Those living friends of GNB, musicians and others, who had known him intimately express as much respect for GNB, the gentleman, as for GNB, the musician. According to Devakottai Narayana Iyengar, GNB respected elder vidwans. He would not sit in front of Ariyakudi on a chair as an equal. According to Iyengar, whenever he learnt any kriti from Ariyakudi, GNB would sit on the floor to show his reverence for the master seated on a swing (oonjal). He

never spoke ill of others; nor did he criticise their music. He was, however, frank with his disciples in giving his assessment of their performances and pointing out the areas for improvement. Another human element was his tension before every concert. The late V. Someswara Babu, a good friend of mine and disciple of GNB, once told me that before every concert the maestro would have butterflies in his stomach! It testified to his anxiety to ensure that he fulfilled the expectations of his rasikas.

He was also capable of singing a song appropriate to the occasion. I remember his performance in Madurai in the 1940s under the auspices of the Sangeeta Samrakshana Sabha. As he finished one song he saw a lady leaving the hall. He immediately started singing *Nalla sakunam nokki selladi* ("Look for an auspicious sign before leaving the place"). There was laughter in the audience and the lady sat down!

WRITE TO US!

We would love to get to know you, dear reader, and hear your views, suggestions and thoughts on the journal or any topic related to the performing arts. Please email us at bhamusic@yahoo.co.in or write in to us at :

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ON THE FATHER BY THE SON

by G. B. Duraiswamy

(Reproduced from the official GNB biography written by T.S. Vedagiri, K. S. Mahadevan and Muthuraman, released on the occasion of GNB's 75th birthday celebrations conducted by G. B. Duraiswamy and GNB Trust at the Music Academy, Chennai.)

The Editors have requested me to write as a son my impressions of what it was to have a famous father like GNB. I respond to their request not without a great deal of diffidence and some embarrassment.

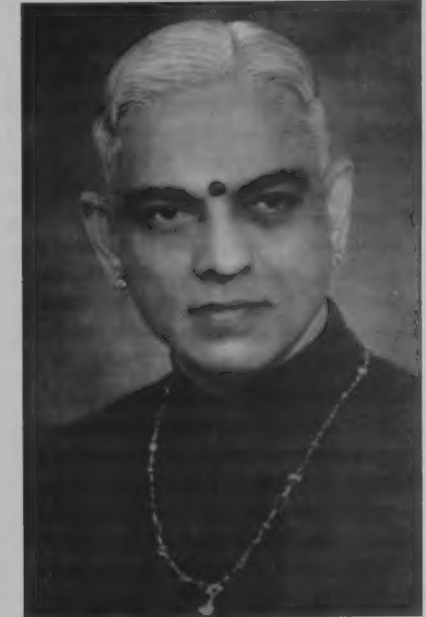
I was the first child and son and perhaps have spent the longest time with him.

Growing up in a large family and being the eldest is a lonesome affair. I was lucky that I have had for company, his disciples who were staying with us. At one stage of my life, I became more a rasika of GNB than his son!

I do not remember much of my father as he was seldom in town, since it was the busiest time in his career. Naturally, we his children hardly saw much of him. And when he was in town and at home, he always had visitors calling on him and spending hours with him. We, the children, didn't have a chance!

I can recall only a few instances when all of us have been together as a family. On several days, when he was in the city, he had concert engagements and we were asked not to disturb him and to stay away from the house till evening. Sometimes, we would be sent away to a cinema or a friend's house.

When he had a visitor he used to call me up and introduce me. Often he was not sure what class I was studying in. His hectic



career, left him so few opportunities to mix with his children. I suppose that must be the lot of the children of other busy musicians also.

For several years after his death, I could not help feeling that he was just on one of his usual trips! So used were we to his absence.

He was firm on one thing, that none of us should take to music as a career. He used to describe the music world as a jungle and

that one in the family was enough! My sisters did learn music more to acquire a marriage qualification than for art's sake. That too only when he was away and when the teacher was free. One Sri Chinnaswamy, a Nadaswara Vidwan, used to teach everyone as they grew up. He has played at my father's wedding and is still alive.

At one stage, I became an ardent worshipper of Sri Palghat Mani Iyer and wanted to learn mridangam. Father, in a moment of weakness agreed and a mridangam was obtained. One day, I made the mistake of practising on the mridangam, forgetting that father was taking rest in the afternoon. Out went the mridangam for good from the house! Mani Iyer just smiled when he heard the episode.

I cannot truthfully say that none of us can sing, since most of us learnt several songs as he was teaching his shishyas. Once or twice, he used to chide them and say, 'See he is able to sing just by hearing, why can't you?' We were all 'bathroom singers' and that too when father was away.

He used to expect absolute silence while he was at home and had a calling bell by his side to ring when any noise was heard. I can never recall his ever coming down and playing with the children. After the 7th child was born, sometimes mother or sister would take the child upstairs and he would play with it.

One feature that stands out most in my mind was the attitude of my father on the day of concert, be it a free or paid one. From the morning, his mood would be rather serious and he would not talk much to

people and gave an impression of being tense. He would have a very simple meal and would include bittergourd as a dish in one form or the other for lunch. He would like a small quantity of plain rice uppuma at 4-00 p.m. and munch a handful of roasted almonds. Even when he went out on tour, he used to take this in a sealed bottle.

He normally chewed pan often, but on the concert day, after lunch, he would stop till the concert was over. He would be humming various tunes and being very curious to know what he was going to sing that day, we used to eavesdrop to hear that raga it was. He would think of Kalyani as the main raga at one time, Thodi while going in the car and would eventually sing Shanmugapriya or Kambhoji in the end! Many admirers used to ask us before the concert what he was going to sing - as if we knew - and our forecasts have never been right!

Another very important aspect is that he was never late to a concert. Invariably, he would always be there well in time and sometimes accompanists would arrive only later.

It is equally strange that he never liked to listen to recordings of his own music, I remember when HMV made some records in 1946, they had sent samples of these so that, father could listen and decide what was to be finally selected. All of us very eagerly gathered to listen but within a minute of starting, he asked that the machine be shut off and the record was sent to his very close friend, Sri C. K. Venkatanarasimhan's house so that he would decide what was best! He was

equally against any one recording his music, as he felt very conscious of the instrument in front and did not feel at home. Most of the recordings we have now were either taken without his knowledge or from someone whom he would have found it very difficult to refuse.

Particularly, during the Music Academy's season, we used to get phone calls from his admirers every minute requesting him to sing this song or that song or that raga or the other. I do not think he ever knew what he was going to sing till he actually sat on the platform. People used to joke and say that the printing of a programme sheet for him was a waste.

As I grew up and came in contact with other musicians, I noticed that this reverence to the court and the tension gripped even great masters like Ariyakkudi, Pandi Ravi Shankar and a few others. Their humility and respect for the listening public was a common factor.

It may sound strange in this day and age when I say that my mother had never been to any of father's concerts! Only once when we were living in Palathope and there was a function in the residence of Sri K. V. Krishnaswamy Iyer, we compelled her to come. She came very reluctantly and sat in a corner where father could not see her. As ill luck would have it, on the same evening my grandmother's brother's wife, who had undergone a very simple operation that afternoon died by about 7 p.m. We had to call mother back home.

When father got the President's Award, she came with us to Delhi and was present when he received the award from the Vice

President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan.

One other aspect of father was his great reverence for his mother at all times. He would seek her blessings every time he went out on tour and even for concerts in the city.

The disciples had full control of father's finance. All of us had to take money only from them for our needs.

I have never heard him speak disparagingly or ill of any fellow artist nor would he allow anyone to do so in his presence. When he heard a good song on the radio that caught his fancy, he used to ask the singer to come home and learnt the song from him.

He got the Government appointment in the All India Radio when normally people retire from service but he was actually conscious of his responsibilities and took his job very seriously.

It amazes me that there are still countless admirers of his music who can recall vividly even the songs in his concerts and who go into ecstasies in their nostalgic memories. The younger generation today are taking very keen interest in his music and style of singing and want to know more about him. This is the one and only reason that I have taken upon myself the task of releasing his biography recognising his substantial contribution to the widening and deepening of Carnatic Music.

Meanwhile, my hearty thanks are due to the small band of enthusiasts who have helped me in this project out of their abundant admiration for father and made it, I hope, a success. □

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GNB REMINISCENCES

by Dr. Sakuntala Narasimhan

Do a Google search on GNB and you come up with no less than 15,300 entries. A web search for GNB's compositions alone brings up 63,700 results – and in this, the GNB Centenary year, there is even a Gnbalasubramaniam.com site with audio and video clips. As one of the legendary artistes of the Carnatic music scene during the middle years of the 20th century, GNB garnered one of the largest followings among rasikas, and many of them, now in their eighties, have posted comments on the internet too.

So what remains to be said, to mark GNB the musician's birth centenary? I decided I would veer away from all the predictable comments from his admirers and disciples, and go for personal reminiscences.

Sometime during the early 1950s, when I was a schoolgirl at Delhi, GNB came to the capital to give a concert for a leading sabha (the Shanmukhananda sabha, if I remember right). He stayed at our house opposite Mandi House and T.N.Krishnan, then a young up-and-coming violinist, was put up at Dr. V.K.Narayana Menon's house not far from where we stayed. He stayed for three days and taught me three of his own compositions – *Paraamukhamela namma* in Kaanada ragam, *Sadaapalaya* in Mohanam and *Parama krupaa saagari* in Yadukulakambhoji. After learning the Kaanada kriti first, I had to sing it back to him, to check that I had got it right. Krishnan, who came over (riding a bicycle that he had borrowed from Menon) to



discuss the items that GNB was planning to sing the next day at his concert, heard me sing the kriti, and later told my mother "Your daughter sings very well". To the schoolgirl in me, that was high praise indeed. GNB then went on to teach me the other two kritis composed by him too.

I remember the day of his concert. He had taken some trouble over dressing up for the occasion—hair sleeked down and coloured a distinguished grey, his panchakachcham veshti a dazzling white,

matching the diamonds sparkling in his ears—and enjoyed the 'cauliflower bajji' that my mother had prepared for afternoon tiffin, along with some sweet sooji halwa, which, he pointed out, soothed the voice before a concert.

That evening's concert included the Thyagaraja kriti in Shankarabharanam, *Sundareswaruni joochi*. It was at that time, a rare composition. I am not sure whether he included it because my mother asked him to teach me that song, or whether she had asked him to teach it to me after hearing him include it in the recital, but he taught me that kriti too, complete with his trade mark brikas.

He had 'style' – and I don't mean just the musical style or 'bani'. He had style as a person - debonair, suave, tall and imposing - someone who was conscious of the fact that he had flair and was a trendsetter. As undoubtedly he was.

He had musical 'daring' (not in terms of using a tavil or dholak as percussion accompaniment for his vocal concerts, but in terms of exploring unknown territories, whether it was unusual ragas or manodharma phrases) and was also a trendsetter in terms of expressing admiration for Hindustani musicians. There are many stories of his friendship with, and respect for, Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. It is said that he was instrumental in getting Khan saheb to perform during the Madras December season, during the 50s.

I was a great admirer of GNB's racy, 'brika laden' style, and in fact, after visiting him at his Chennai home, some years later,

while I was a boarder at the Central College of Karnatic Music - CCKM, as it was known then - even wrote to my mother at Delhi saying that I wanted to become his disciple rather than completing the Sangita Vidwan course at the college. That did not happen, but his 'bani' that was based on the nagaswaram style of improvisation, did influence my approach to Carnatic music (as one critic observed, in a review).

He was 'different' from musicians who were his contemporaries in the mid-50s – he was a graduate (B.A.Hons) and fluent in English, and had a sophistication and polish that the archetypal musician of yesteryear did not particularly specialise in. He had also acted in films – not just any films but glamorous ones, with M.S.Subbulakshmi (another vocalist I greatly admired and looked up to) as his leading lady, that too, in a film based on one of the most romantic tales in history - *Shaakuntalam*. He could also be very witty, with double *entendre* thrown in - I remember his comment once, when he described a contemporary as having a "bad heart" – he meant it physiologically, it was true that musician had had a heart attack, but it was clear that GNB was being cheeky in choosing that phrase!

There are some songs that I, like so many others, associate instinctively with GNB. *Himagiri tanaye hemalate*, in Shuddha Dhanyasi, for instance, or *Vasudevayani* in Kalyani ragam – not that none else sang this song, but it was still an item that one associated almost exclusively with the GNB rendition - *Dikku teriyaada kaattil* (ragamalika) and *Radha sametha krishna*. Recently, when I was teaching my students

this last song, my mind vaulted over the intervening decades, to relive the rendition by GNB.

At a time half a century ago when it was not common to hear rare and vakra ragas chosen for elaboration, he would take up Nalinakanti, and deliver an alapana which took one's breath away with racy phrases and improvisations. He went on to compose a kriti *Nee paadame gati Nalinakanti*, in this raga. Andolika was another such raga. His disciples, including MLV, took this tradition of essaying vakra ragas forward, with aplomb and finesse.

He served All India Radio as one of its first top-notch performing musician-advisors (Ravi Shankar was perhaps the first such recruit). This added to his public image, especially among the youngsters. He wrote articles (another first perhaps – that too, in English). Looking back over these 50 years since his heyday, one realises how much of a trendsetter he was, because today,

these additional dimensions (apart from the concert- related expertise) have become commonplace.

I remember the day in May 1965 when AIR broadcast the news of his demise, and followed it up with a programme devoted to comments from his contemporaries from the world of music. It was late evening, I was busy in the kitchen in our apartment in south Mumbai, preparing dinner, while I listened to the programme, and recall Semmangudi's comment, that 55 was "no age to die". True. And amazing, considering that he founded a style of his own, the GNB bani, which was carried forward by a string of disciples as well as 'imitators'.

That is what is left behind, as his abiding contribution, regardless of a listing of the honours that were showered on him, including the Sangita Kalanidhi. There are many Kalanidhis, but only one GNB.

□

OBITUARY



Smt. Padma Varadan, eminent veena artiste, daughter and disciple of the late Sri Rangaramanuja Ayyangar (the author of the magnum opus, *Kritimanimalai* Series) and a member of Shanmukha's editorial advisory board, passed away in Nov 2009. Padma had performed all over India and abroad and was an 'A' grade artiste of All India Radio and Doordarshan.

As the founder Trustee of Vipanchi Charitable Trust, she continued her father's publication work. One of her contributions was the English adaptation of the first three volumes of *Kritimanimalai*.



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THE GNB I NEVER HEARD LIVE

By P. Vasanth Kumar



Gudalur Narayanaswamy Balasubramanian popularly referred to as GNB by his countless admirers, rasikas and friends all over the world, has been one of the most charismatic singers in the Carnatic music firmament. The magnitude of the impression he was able to create with his brilliant and breathtaking music makes him a frequently discussed musician amongst Carnatic music vidwans and rasikas, even more than 40 years after he left this mundane world.

This writer who has only listened to GNB's music through AIR and private recordings, has however had the good fortune of having heard a good deal of the priceless

music offered by his star disciple M.L.Vasantakumari, besides the music of his other disciples like Tanjavur S. Kalyanaraman and Trissur V. Ramachandran.

Manodharma was GNB's forte and his brilliant raga vinyaasas and swara prasthaaras stand testimony to this fact. He was equally strong in the lakshana aspects of Carnatic music. His contemporary Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer has confided to his close students that one could never come across a grammatical flaw in the music of GNB.

GNB had a flair for singing vivaadi ragas as well but he kept the singing to a bare

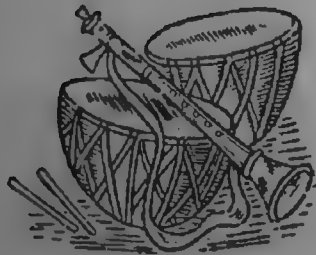
minimum, often singing only the kritis with a few solfa passages. He has reportedly told his chela MLV that he derived immense satisfaction only while rendering rakti raagas.

Much has been written about him being the pioneer in rendering porutthams while singing kalpana swaras. Sulochana Pattabhiraman (this writer's mother) frequently used to recollect how GNB once chided her after listening to her Akashvani radio concert. While being lavish in his praise for her raga, kriti and neraval expositions, he questioned her about her singing a few snatches of raga phrases during her swara singing for the kriti *Sri Kantimateem* in *Desisimharavam*. He advised her to refrain from this and remarked that if one could sing snatches

of ragas during kalpana swara singing, why not sing a few avartanas of swaras during alapanas. GNB strictly adhered to this aspect and one has rarely heard MLV singing raga phrases interspersed with her enchanting kalpana swara renditions.

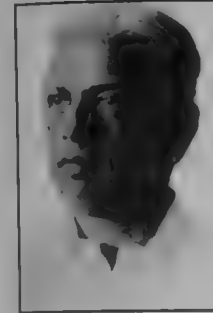
Gamakas in GNB's music were chiseled and fashioned in a manner to suit his voice and style. There was never exaggeration in his oscillations. He frequently opined to his students that one should remember to follow up a gamaka with a straight note; for this he would say it should be shaped like a Pillaiyar Suzhi.

Carnatic music has an eternal freshness and many outstanding exponents are sure to blossom but GNB's music will always be spoken of till the sun and moon shine. □



GNB-THE ALTERER OF DESTINIES

by Sriram Gangadharan



To impact and alter the destiny of individuals not only during one's lifetime but also after it, needless to say requires a very rare special kind of power. This power is usually attributed

only to spiritual greats. Sangita Kalanidhi Sri G. N. Balasubramaniam and his music had this power and I speak from personal experience.

My formal training in music started at the age of six on the flute. During this initial period I never even remotely thought that I would ever start singing professionally. My parents wanted me to become a flautist so all my energies and practice went only into this lovely instrument. It was when I was around fifteen years of age that I first heard the music of Sri G.N.B. on tape. What I heard was a rendition of *Maragadavalleem* in Kambhoji and this changed my life forever. Till then I did have the chance to listen to many great and leading artistes of the time but I had not heard anything like G.N. sir's music, in fact I was awed and completely clueless as to how anything like it was possible. I immediately became completely addicted to and possessed by his music. I put in intense efforts to play his kind of music on the flute but I could not stretch the instrument beyond its limits. It was at this juncture that I actually tried my hand at serious singing to express all that I wanted. One thing led to another and I was blessed with great success at my first vocal concert and the flautist forever became the singer. G.N.B had worked his magic yet

again and the job of altering yet another man's destiny was successfully completed and I was one of those born years after his demise. I can say with certainty that if I had not heard the music of this great master I might never have taken to a career in music. And I am not alone in this; I have heard many accomplished artistes express the same. The spell that this man from Gudalur has cast upon so many of us is supremely irresistible and enduring

On a lighter vein I have always maintained that G.N.B is the most dangerous thing to ever happen to Carnatic music. This is because he conquers the listener, completely possessing and transforming him into a helpless addict of his music, thus rendering it almost impossible for him to listen to anybody else. His victims are innumerable. For many years this was the very issue I faced. And this was not at all good news for the budding professional musician that I was. G.N.B himself has said that it is very important to keep an open mind, listen to all types of music and imbibe good influences from all possible sources. He has always stressed that every musician should work on eventually evolving his own unique style and not just be a follower of somebody. It took me quite some time to shake myself out of my helplessness and the intoxicating spell of his music and to resume listening to and learning from the music of so many other great masters and performers of the past and present. But like a mother is always most special to a child, his music will always hold the most special place in my heart. Hats off to Sri G. N. Balasubramaniam, the immortal prince charming of Carnatic music! □

ENNAPPADAM SRI VENKITARAMA BHAGAVATAR (1880 - 1961)

by Ganga Ramachandran



MUSICAL LINEAGE

Venkitarama was born in a musically inclined family in the year 1880 on the 21st of February (1055 M.E. Kumbha month) at Ennappadam village in Cochin, Kerala to Sri Padmanābhayyar and Sitālakshmi ammāl. His father and grandfather were both experts in singing Arunāchala Kritis, Tyāgarāja Kritis, Dikshitar Kritis and others to the accompaniment of 'Gettuvadyam'—they used to play this instrument themselves.

Gettuvadyam is also known as **Getchu vadyam** or **Gethu vadyam**

Hence he belonged to the tradition of great lovers of music who sang with devotion though they were not professional vidwans.

MUSICAL TRAINING

In his childhood Venkitarama was taught Tamil, Malayalam, and Granthāksharam, both to read and write. Venkitarāma Bhāgavata, along with his brother Ratnagiriswara Bhāgavata started learning

music systematically under Nochur Ayyabhāgavata—their paternal uncle who at that time was the Aāsthana Vidwān of Kottakkal Sāmūtiri Kovilakam.

It was his elder brother, Ratnagiriswara Bhāgavata, who strictly made Venkitarāma practice music and taught him the nuances of singing rāga alapanas. Venkitarāma Bhāgavata had great respect and regard towards his elder brother, who had mastered the art of rendering Ragam Tanam and Pallavi.

During the four years of 'Gurukulavaasam' with Ayyabhāgavata, the two brothers sang in concerts, accompanying their guru and thereby gaining experience in 'Kacēri dharma'.

Subsequently during 1895-1901, they travelled widely to Coimbatore, Madurai, Pazhani, Rāmanāthapuram, Dēvakottai, Rāmēswaram and other places giving concerts and listening to great masters of their time. Venkitarāma Bhagavata and his brother, were a popular duo performing in the same venues as these veterans. They imbibed a lot of performing skill.

At the height of their fame, Venkitarāma Bhāgavata was bereaved by the sudden, untimely demise of his brother Ratnagiriswara Bhagavata at the very young age of 22. Lonely, forlorn, crestfallen and despondent, Venkitarāma Bhāgavata with the persuasive coaxing and encouragement of vidwans recovered from the shock of his sibling's death and upto

the age of thirty five gave Karnatic music performances. He was fortunate enough to have listened to the great vidwan Ennappadam Fiddle Krishnayyar accompanying Maha Vaidyanatha Sivan and Raghava Bhagavata. During his travels, Venkitarāma Bhāgavata had the privilege of hearing great exponents of Karnatic music like Venugānam Sarabha Sāstrigal, Palakkad Anantarāma bhāgavata, Ramanathapuram Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar and Patnam Subramanya Iyer. Though by listening to great doyens, he acquired performing skills, for singing he had adopted his brother's and Anantarāma Bhāgavata's style. Till his 35th year he continued giving Karnatic concerts alone.

HARIKATHA PERFORMER

Story-telling has been an integral part of ancient Indian socio-religious gatherings. Religious festivals or social occasions such as weddings etc. were considered incomplete without a story-telling session. As each region developed its unique style of story narration, South Indians developed the art to suit their society and interest. Kathakalakshepa is the famous art form in South India in which a single performer entertains an audience with tales and anecdotes putting his musical, acting and story-rendering skills to best use. The themes were borrowed from the ever popular religious epics, the Puranas and Hindu religious mythology. Musical accompanists supported the performer in dramatizing the performance and maintaining the interest of the audience. In Kerala, story-telling developed into three different art forms – Paathakam, Harikatha

and Kathaprasangam.

By the end of the nineteenth century, 'Harikatha' became very popular and all music vidwāns used this medium to communicate to the masses. Venkitarāma Bhāgavata is said to have composed many songs and niroopanas (story line) based on Ramayana. As an exponent of Harikatha his fame spread far and wide. He received many titles and honours from Kings of Travancore, Cochin, Mysore, Baroda etc. during this time. He traveled widely to far off places like Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, etc doing Harikatha, thus getting more and more fame. Traveling to different places he got acquainted with the languages Telugu, Kannada, Hindi, Marathi, Sanskrit in addition to Malayalam and Tamil. This would have given him an opportunity to adapt to the different styles of story-telling in various regions.

TURNING POINT

When Venkitarama Bhagavata was fifty one, he had a severe attack of 'Vasoori' disease. The Bhakta in him, composed five Kritis on his family Goddess *Parukkancheri Amman* in Ennappadam village and continued singing them with great difficulty. Slowly he began recovering and within one month he was completely cured, without even a trace of mark on his body. Venkitarama Bhagavata humbly admits in his 'Aatmakatha' that this new lease of life was due to the Divine Grace. To ward off all evils and sickness for the rest of his life he composed 108 kritis beginning with each of the 108 Divine Names of Kṛṣṇa. Thus this miraculous recovery, saw the birth of 'Sri Kṛṣṇāṣṭottara Sata Nāmākritigal'.

They are 108 kritis in 108 different rāgās, a proof of his mastery over Sanskrit and music. Venkitarama Bhagavata has signed almost all his kritis with his own name "Venkataramana", hence he is Swanaama mudra karaka Vaggeyakara.

KRITIS

Kerala Sangeeta Nataka Academy has published in 1964 "Venkataramaneeyam" a compilation of 146 kritis of Venkataramana Bhagavata in Malayalam script notated with the help of Ennappadam Viswanatha Bhagavata -his younger brother and disciple.

He is said to have a lineage of disciples through his son Ramachandra Bhagavata,

a popular musician of his time, grand daughter Smt. Thankam, and Smt. Omana and Smt. Jayamani. Of these devoted students, the latter still continues to perform Harikatha in Kerala.

Apart from the songs published in Venkataramaneeyam, the author has come across other kritis in rare talas from the manuscript obtained through the descendants. The talas used are named as Nuti, Preeti, and Devaranjanam.

The Kritis in rare ragas like Sumukhi , Prakasini, Sridhari , Rasa bhauli, Murali nadam, Vrindavana Kutuhalam, Priyadarsini, and Rasa varaali show his musical propensity.

□

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INTERVIEW:

COMMITTED TO THE CAUSE

by Jyothi Mohan



V. P. Dhananjayan

I had heard a lot about the Dhananjayans for several years, from adoring shishyas and from fans who spoke very highly of them. Their uncompromising pursuit of performing excellence coupled with dedicated teaching has won them several awards including the prestigious Padma Bhushan. Their visit to Mumbai for their performances during the dance festival

conducted by SSFASS, provided me with the opportunity to meet and interview this widely-travelled dancing couple.

At the appointed hour, Sri Dhananjayan was ready and without any fuss, settled down in one corner of the vast Shanmukhananda stage, to answer my queries. Extremely soft-spoken, polite and patient, he was forthcoming on a range of topics.

"Are you not dismayed by the fact that youngsters today evince more interest in Western dance than in our own classical dance forms," I asked. He replied that both society and the government have to pitch in their efforts to make the younger generation aware of their rich cultural heritage. He is convinced that the ills plaguing our society can be addressed by weaning them away from blindly aping the west. By exposing them to the wealth of our values through classical art forms, we can make them sensitive, culturally rich citizens of tomorrow, he avers. Towards this end, he feels that classical art forms should be integrated into the education system, so that children are taught these arts during their formative years. (This has also been stressed upon, repeatedly, by Sangeetha Kalanidhi Sri Nedunuri Krishnamurthy). This will also ensure that we have a culturally educated audience in future, he stated.

"Don't you think that classical art forms can act as a soothing balm to young troubled minds? Does it not provide them with an avenue for expressing themselves, thus helping them in stress management, which is of great importance in today's fiercely competitive world," I asked. He answered that in several universities in the West, courses in classical music and dance were offered along with other subjects. Both the students as well as faculty recognised the therapeutic value of both sangeetham and natyam. Unfortunately, in our country, very few of such options are available and not many opt for them. He also felt that parents outside the country took pains to enrol their children in camps where yoga, natyam and sangeetham were taught. In fact, for several

years now, he and his wife Smt. Shanta Dhananjayan have been conducting a gurukulam at Virginia. Many youngsters have benefited immensely by this exposure to our culture, values, mythology and so on. On the other hand, parents here take pride in enrolling their children in hip-hop and film-based dances which go by the name of Western dance!

The role of the media, he felt, was of great importance. These days, one rarely sees announcements of classical events, which would enable those interested, to attend such programmes. Publishing reviews and articles on natyam or sangeetham, he felt, served to provide information. Instead, one finds mention of only movie-based entertainment, which serves more to titillate than educate! Hence, a responsible media would help in exposing the masses to our classical arts and encourage them to learn more about them.

The need of the hour is to provide a platform to upcoming dancers who have made the grade. Most sabhas feature artistes who can pay their way through but whose standard of performance is generally very mediocre. The talented youngsters therefore find no programmes and it is very frustrating for them after they spend years learning natyam with total dedication. When I asked Sri Dhananjayan about this, he spoke about ABHAI (The Association of Bharatanatyam Artistes of India). He was the Founder-Secretary and later, President of ABHAI which forged unity among Gurus, dancers, musicians, make-up artistes and connoisseurs. It has been providing a platform to young students of

dance during its anniversary celebrations besides offering them awards, assistance etc. It also organises camps, lecdems etc. for the students to hone their talent further. He felt that the sabhas should nurture talent and give them opportunities to perform without expecting donations.

The Dhananjayans have rendered yeoman service in propagating our art and culture. At their Bharata Kalanjali in Chennai they have trained among others, several financially backward students and given them the confidence to become professional dancers and teachers. They have taken integrated quality education to a remote village in Kerala by establishing Bhaaskara for the benefit of rural children. This has been funded by his life savings. Indeed the Dhananjayans have given back a lot to society. They are truly not only great artistes but also great social activists and educationists. Their message for the younger generation is, "Be true to the art form you practise and use it for the betterment of society." He said, "You realise The Supreme through natyam and sangeetham and this can be felt by the rasikas when you put your soul into your

performance. At a performance in the Gulf, a Sheikh, who understood none of the lyrics or the stories, was nevertheless moved to tears by what he saw. He came up to me, held my hands and thanked me for giving him a glimpse of Allah. Such is the power of our sangeetham and natyam".

At this juncture, Smt. Shanta Dhananjayan joined us. Despite the hectic day earlier and the evening programme, scheduled to commence an hour later, at the Sabha, both spoke with great enthusiasm and warmth. The various honours that have come their way, sit very lightly on them. They are friendly, gracious and down-to-earth with no airs about them. When I asked them the secret of their energy and zest they laughed in unison, pointing upwards—thanking the Lord for His generosity. The spring in their step and the twinkle in their eyes showed that one is as young as one feels! I came away feeling very charged and inspired and understood very well why the world spoke so highly of this dynamic dancing couple. They are indeed role models for the generations to come. □



MUSIC, A SCIENTIFIC ART

by Shri R. H. Thyagaraju

Music is a component of expression. It manifests right from the level as latent as running in the background of a verbal communication to the richness of emotive instrumental music devoid of any wordings but filled with the content of music. 'Content' of music has serious connotations in technical realms of music, which we will revisit later. However this word is used in a very common (or colloquial) sense of the word in the previous sentence.

Let us consider the role of music as a latent companion in general verbal communication. Let us take the kinds of sentences – declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory. These 'kinds' of sentences are not peculiar to English alone. Whatever be the language that is being spoken, even an unfamiliar one, it is possible to make out which kind of sentence has been spoken. When we listen to a conversation in an unfamiliar language, what makes us recognize whether the sentence is a declarative or interrogative or of any other type? It is the 'music' of the sentence that tells us whether a question is asked or a fact has been declared. Scientifically speaking, the sentences giving different emotional expressions end with the appropriate musical note. The declarative sentences end with 'madhya sthaayi shadjam'. Lighter interrogatives like those used in railway enquiry, etc end with pancham. Strong interrogatives out of disgust end with taara sthhaayi shadjam or taara sthaayi

chatusshruthi rishabham. Panic-struck situations call for ending the sentence with chathusshruthi daivatham. Imperative sentences end with antara gaandhaaram of madhya sthaayi. The imperative sentences of cajoling type addressing children end with madhya sthaayi chathusshruthi rishabham. Statements of love end with madhya sthaayi shuddha madhyamam. Likewise, we could relate the twelve varieties of emotions with twelve swara sthaanamams. The twelve swara sthaanamams being same for all the types of music of the world, this concept has a universal validity.

From the above idea, the musical notes can be considered as an abstraction of a variety of basic human emotions. The combination of several basic emotions, gives rise to a large number of permutations of human emotions. For instance, when an intimate person reprimands, the resulting feeling is a combination of affection, annoyance, attentiveness, feeling of belongingness, etc. Whereas, when a neutral person reprimands, other combinations of basic emotions, namely anger, disturbance, etc. come into play. Coming back to music, a musical phrase produces a combination of emotions corresponding to the notes comprising the phrase. A combination of swara-phrases forms a musical piece. Thus music is the intensification of human emotions.

While it is obvious that the words directly give the sense of what is communicated,

and since music inconspicuously accentuates the sense when the words are spoken out, the synergism between the words and music is imminent. That is how the idea of song might have taken birth much before the idea of music was identified. As the human being grew in his sensibilities and intellectual faculty, music discreetly came to occupy the mind of man. It eventually grew to be a subject of study.

Let us again come back to the fundamental aspects of music. Music had perhaps become a subject of study when sound had been identified to possess three fundamental attributes namely, loudness, timber and pitch, in the same order of complexity. Timber is the differentiating factor between voices of different people. We recognize a person by his voice based on the uniqueness of her / his timber of the voice.

Pitch of the sound is set (instinctively) on the basis of the nature of emotion being expressed. Now the question is, whether a certain level of pitch is employed for a certain emotion by all the people universally. The pitch level cannot be the same universally, since it depends upon factors like ethos of the society, psychology of the individual person speaking and the perception of the speaker about the listener, etc. For example the expression of anger of a person of sophisticated background seems too mild compared to that of a person of crude background. However, in a given kind of society bearing homogeneous social habits among its peoples, the pitch levels of the sentences

spoken show up stronger correlation with the emotional levels expressed. This is how the concept of 'speech-melody' (music of the spoken language) holds good.

Now let us jump into the arena of pure music. It is said that a boy is known by the company he keeps and the girl is known by the books she reads. We can extend this to: a person is known by the music he likes. There is also another well-known saying, 'people get the (kind of) music they deserve' which is related to our idea of the last sentence.

The 'kind' of music is same as profundity of music. It is akin to profundity in literary statements. Higher the intellectual and / or spiritual level of a person, he enjoys more and more profound ideas. So also he enjoys profound music (provided he/she has a 'ear' for music). It is an important idea that profound music is available in all forms of music – be it western, Indian, classical, light or film-music.

Like many other areas of knowledge, music has both scientific and artistic aspects. Science of music talks about ideas like sruthi, swaram, scale, development of a raga, musical structure, rhythm, time-patterns, etc. What are the artistic aspects? The moment we analyze this aspect scientifically, it ceases to be artistic. But let the analysis be done in an unobtrusive manner.

The artistic aspects of music are – profundity, content and rasa of music. All these three aspects are abstract. To explain these, to talk on 'abstraction of a raga' is the prerequisite.

Raga and its abstraction: Let us take up an experiment. Let us take a set of 5 swaras, say, shadjam, rishabham-2, gandharam-2, panchamam, dhaivatam-2. The same notes of taara sthaayi also could be used. Using a harmonium, go on playing phrases of notes. Even random phrases would do. Say, srg, srgrg, rgpg, dpg, sdpg, rpg, rgdp, dpgrg, dpgrgp, etc. After a while, a certain feeling is created. This feeling would be different from what would have been created with any other set of swaras used. Let us call this as 'musical-feeling' or 'musical-mood'. The kind of musical mood is unique to the set of swaras used for producing the music. Once there is clarity in the musical mood that has been identified, it is said to have been abstracted from the music played. The set of swaras is technically termed as 'aarohana and avarohana'. The set used in ascending pitch-levels is called aarohana and the set used while descending is called avarohana. While aarohana and avarohana have the same set of swaras for majority of ragas, there are a good number of ragas with slight difference in the sets of swaras in aarohana and avarohana. Reiterating the above point, the musical mood produced is unique to a certain pair of aarohana & avarohana. Hence the musical mood can be assigned a unique name. The technical term for the 'musical mood' is 'raaga'. Several well known unique names of ragas are: Mohanam, Bilahari, Kambhoji, Bhairavi, Kharaharapriya, etc.

The interesting point is that the experiment described above is only meant for providing clarity. This is not the way how

majority of the ragas were formed historically. The ragas were applied long before the science of music was developed. What science did was, identified / assigned aarohana and avarohana for the existing ragas, and made a way to create new ragas in a systematic manner. Science also provided the technique of writing notation for the music; so that music could be transmitted from place to place in the form of notation. The biggest pitfall that could happen with notation is that it cannot help in transferring the richness to the fullest extent as conceived by the composer, unless the singer utilizing the notation had adequately carried out 'abstraction' of the raga employed in the song.

Now let us expand the idea of 'abstraction of raga'. Suppose one listens repeatedly, to the songs – *Vatapi*, *Shree Raghukula*, *Vandeham*, *Gajavadana* and *Vinayaka ninnu vinaa*. All of these are by different composers. The musical settings are different from one another. When one ignores the lyrical part of these songs for the time being, some musical aspect common to all these songs would register in the mind when listening to all these songs for a number of times. That 'common musical aspect' is the raaga-bhaavam of *Hamsadhwani*. The essence of the raga *Hamsadhwani* is contained in all the five songs, even though they have different musical composition and rhythm. The abstraction of raaga happens better when the same exercise is done for another raaga, say *Mohanam*. The level of abstraction becomes higher with a listener of higher experience with the same raaga

and with his/her techno-aesthetic standards in music.

Now, let us take up the artistic aspects of music, namely profundity, content and rasa. These three aspects are not necessarily disjoint. I am trying to put in words about these ideas to the best of my understanding:

Profundity of music: A piece of music is said to be profound when joy of the raaga is brought out from the simplest of swara patterns or even unexpected swara patterns.

Another way the music is made profound is, by using the common swara phrases, but bringing out more richness of the raga by employing appropriate gamakas in executing the swara phrases. Example: Nedunuri garu sang kalpana swaram in *Sreeranjani*. He sang dns-s, which is very common for this raga. He employed appropriate nasality and anuswaram to bring out rich bhavam of *Sreeranjani* while executing this.

Content of music: Shri Nedunuri often talks about the musical content. Higher the number of swara phrases or nuances of the raga employed in executing (or composing) an item, higher is the musical content. His setting of an Annamacharya song *Palumaru utla panduganu* in folk style was made not only in an unexpected raga *Mukhari* (for folk tune), but the song contains lot of richness of the raaga. The

song was made to 'contain' lot of Mukhari even though the song has been composed in folk idiom.

Rasa of music: Rasa is closely related to 'touching the heart'. It has more to do with purity of raaga executed in a way so as to please the heart, and less to do with 'intelligence' aspect of music. The best indication of rasa is wetness of the eyes of the listeners.

Another idea is why certain raagas are universally liked by all the listeners and certain raagas might be somewhat less preferred by some listeners. Let us first see which of the ragas are universally liked by all the people. According to me, some such ragas are *Aarabhi*, *Athaana*, *Bilahari*, *Kaambhoji*, *Kalyani*, *Karnataka Devagandhari*, *Devagandhari*, *Bhairavi*, *Mohanam*, *Anandabhairavi*, etc. I have not seen a single person saying that she/he does not like the raagas mentioned above. What notes are common to all the ragas mentioned above? These are chatussruthi rishabham and chatussruthi dhaivatam. Though I do acknowledge that, there are masters who sing very pleasantly, the ragas that might not contain these notes, it is certainly food for thought that the raagas containing both chatussruthi ri & da are liked by many. This has many practical implications. For example when the musician feels the grip of the concert is going down, she / he can employ one of these ragas in the following item.

THE DANCING NATARAJA & OTHER POEMS

by Geeta Radhakrishna



THE DANCING NATARAJA

The rhythm of life,
The pulse that sets the beat,
The measured mathematical monitor,
The taal that sets the pace.
Tat-dhit-tom- nam-Tat-dhit-tom -nam

Nataraja –the distinguished dancer,
Majestic and magnanimous,
Atop the Himalayan heights,
Dancing with timeless, boundless energy.
The movements so vibrant
That even nature stands still – so astounded!
He leaps and lunges,
Swings, slides and stamps -
So loud that the earth trembles!
The vibrations so powerful!

Nataraja – the splendid dancer,
Adorned with a crescent moon and stars,
Sparkling with breathtaking brightness
On his knotted hair.
The beautiful Ganga – mermaid like,
Playfully hiding behind his thick locks,
Surrounded by a wreath of cassia leaves.
A cobra round his neck –alert and unaffected,
By the luminous diamond jewellery,
Tiger skin cloth and tight fitting breaches!

Nataraja –the cosmic dancer,
With four hastas so scintillating!
The right hasta with a damaru,
The symbol of sound, speech and song!
The left hasta with a ball of fire,
A sign of destruction and demolition!
A hasta held in serene gesture to protect and to

bless,
Yet, another hasta stretched to attain salvation!
The right leg firmly stamping away ignorance,
The left leg raised high in search of supreme knowledge!

Nataraja – the magnificent posture,
The cycle of creation, existence and sustenance,
The rhythm maker of the magical sound!
Reverberating with measured accuracy!
Just like the heartbeat so vital for a life to exist,
So is the rhythmic beat so essential for a dancer!
Why this rhythmic dance and the awesome postures?
Is it just for merriment of the cognitive pleasures?
Or just for the thrill of an exciting moment?
Just ponder!

The rhythm of life,
The pulse that sets the beat,
The measured mathematical monitor,
The taal that sets the pace.
Tat-dhit-tom-nam-Tat-dhit-tom-nam.

THE DANCE OF SHIVASHAKTI

Movement is the quintessence
Of the very existence,
The primal act of life,
Without movement there is no Universe!
No thought,
No speech,
No action!
Absolutely no experience at all!

Man is a movement,
The journey from birth to death!
The tiniest ant is a movement,
The largest elephant is a movement,
The little grass is a movement,
The huge banyan tree is a movement,

The minutest worm is a movement,
God is a movement!

When *Shiva* dances the *Tandava*,
When *Devi* dances the *Lasya*,
The creator dances,
The creation dances!
The energy dances,
The intellect dances,
The wholesome movement of the divine!

As long as the dancer dances,
There is the enchanting dance,
The melodious music,
The vibrant drums,
A sensational sculpture,
A marvelous painting,
An inspiring poem,
Movements of aesthetic beauty!

Just when the dancer leaves the stage,
There engulfs an emptiness,
A fearsome void,
A sudden darkness,
A stage with no life,
A lonely silence,
No splashy colour,
Devoid of all movements!

Is it possible to separate a dancer from dance?
A dancer without the movement of dance
Is like a fish out of water,
A tree without an earth,
A bird without a sky,
A body without a soul!
Just as dance is the essence of the dancer
So is the *Atma* never separate from the *Paramatma*!

The cosmic dance is the dance of
ShivaShakti.
ShivaShakti is the dance we perform,
 Everything that we do -
 The *Karma* in thought, word and deed.
 For it is all a movement!
 In the cycle of *janma, marana, punarjanma*-
 Birth, death and rebirth
 A whirlwind of movement!

And where does *Shiva Shakti* dance?
 In the *Cittasabha* -
 The hall of consciousness!
 Within us -
 In the innermost core of our heart,
 In the realm of our innermost being!
 Only *jnana* and *anugraha* can make us
 realise
 That we ourselves are the dance of the *Shiva*
 Shakti

THE GRACEFUL DANSEUSE

Here is a dancer of divine love
 So pure and perfect!
 And when she dances
 It is like a bright star -
 Brilliant and bathing in the divine light!

With each *adavu* she establishes a firm
 stamp,
 A reminder to Mother Earth
 That the strong thud with those little feet,
 Is no ordinary sound,
 But a sound - so measured, accurate and
 precise!

The hands raised at varied angles,
 Sometimes raised up,
 Sometimes lowered down,
 Are like angel's wings held so gracefully,
 Moving and blending with harmony!

When she holds a *mudra*,
 It is like holding a *champaka* flower,
 Radiating its hue all around,
 With its exotic fragrance,
 So sweet and refreshing!

Her movements so gentle,
 Yet, so agile and quick,
 She flits across the stage,
 With leaps and jumps,
 Like a graceful Doe!

As you watch the beautiful danseuse
 Moving with such swift movements,
 Like a giant wave - high and low,
 A sudden thought,
 Is life a battle of sentiments?

Her expressions change
 Like a moving cloud,
 Vivacious and vibrant,
 Then suddenly at a tangent,
 Pensive and penitent!

Whatever is life's philosophy,
 Or life's strange movements,
 Finally, it is the dance,
 The truthful rhythm of existence,
 That makes one exhilaratingly happy!

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MUSIC THERAPY: INDIAN MEDICO'S PERCEPTION

by T. V. Sairam Ph.D (Email: tvsairam@gmail.com)

Though the Indian music system is ancient and one of the highly- developed musical systems of the world, the study and application of the therapeutic aspects of this music has witnessed severe ups and downs. Once lauded in literature such as *Raga Chikitsa* and known to the ancient yogic systems of sound vibrations as *nada yoga*, the Indian concept of therapeutic music stands almost lost to antiquity, due to want of patronage. While Indians accept the entertainment value of music, many of them still harbour doubt whether music could be therapeutic. Recent developments in the west particularly in the United States, where thousands of professional music therapists are involved actively in medical and para-medical institutions, rehabilitation centres, homes for the elderly, psychological and psychiatric facilities have caused certain re-thinking now among Indians, more particularly among those who practice medical professions.

In an attempt to understand the perception of Indian medicos, a survey was launched by the Chennai-based Nada Centre for Music Therapy recently. The opinions sought from the medicos indicate encouraging results that music therapy has a greater role to play in the days to come in the sub-continent.

The excerpts of the survey would reveal the minds of the medicos in so far as the importance of music therapy goes.

Dr Sumana Premkumar, a Radiation Oncologist is of the view that hypertension, depression, age-related and all stress-related disorders can be addressed well by



music. He is also confident that music can be analgesic. However, he has reservations and wonders whether mental retardation is curable with music. He is of the view that music therapy can help, particularly during pre-surgery and post-surgery. Music, he says, is an aid for making the primary treatment effective. He is of the view that it is not classical or film music or tribal music that can be therapeutic. "Any music which is capable of touching a person's soul", according to him, could be healing.

Dr Vijayakumar, also a Radiation Oncologist, is of the view that music can never address mental retardation. He is of the view that unless the patients have some basic exposure to music, the latter cannot be therapeutic for them. He doesn't find the need to use music during counseling sessions, though he recommends it as a post-surgery measure.

Prof (Miss) C. V. Raman, an eighty-year old obstetrician and gynaecologist is of the clear view that all cardio-vascular ailments

respond to music, as several other ailments which are caused by malfunctioning of the mind (e.g., anxiety, tension, phobias, obsession) can be cured with the help of music. For insomnia too, she recommends music therapy. According to her music which is familiar (as for example, regional music) would be more effective than alien music.

Dr. A. Sugandhi, a pathologist and a blood-bank specialist feels that in order to retain the efficacy, the music session can be for around thirty minutes. She is of the view that both vocal and instrumental forms of music can be useful for such therapeutic sessions. She finds while certain forms of music make us "feel solemn and melancholic", there are others which "elevate your mood, makes you want to dance!" She feels that an ideal music therapist should be a coordinator and conductor of sessions- a combination of psychiatrist, general physician and of course, a humanist.

Dr. P. Balamuralikrishna, a medical microbiologist emphasizes on the palliative role of music in human lives. He doesn't foresee the knowledge of the patients for responding to music; all he emphasizes is the conditioning of the patients' minds for music they receive during the therapy sessions. According to him, even in the midst of work, music can play a proactive role. However, the choice of music – whether vocal or instrumental- for therapy sessions is, according to him, subjective. Personally he feels that a "soft, female, mature voice" in classical (Carnatic or

Hindustani style) can be better suited for therapy sessions. For him, the music therapist need not play the role of a general physician, though he should be a humanist and a social scientist.

Dr. I. Jyothi Padmaja, a microbiologist, who had learnt to play veena in her childhood, feels that psychological, chronic pain responds to music. She is of the view that music therapy should be administered in combination with other medical interventions. She feels that fast-paced music cannot be therapeutic. She says that she has no hesitation in recommending music as a complementary medicine for treating age-related disorders, depression, hypertension etc and also as analgesic.

Dr. G. Mukuda Kumarity, a fertility-specialist, who has a musical background of light music feels that apart from other ailments, music can be used in overcoming short temper and irritability encountered in many people. According to her, music therapy sessions can be held ideally during early morning or afternoon. It is better that music is listened to by the patients while lying down on the bed. Some bits of music can be listened to in the midst of work too for a few minutes - to pep up the mood!

For Prof. Ravi Kumar, who is an M.D. in general medicine, music can prove therapeutic for "almost all" ailments. He gives importance to the patient's likes and dislikes in respect of the choice of music for therapy sessions. For him, early morning or late evening are ideal for therapy sessions. He feels that a music therapist should essentially have a

background of general medicine and subjects such as musicology, psychology, psychotherapy, neurology etc should dovetail. He also suggests creation of a music therapy department in medical colleges.

Dr. Ravi Venkatachelam, a cardiologist who learnt Carnatic music for a few years opines that stress, psychological and multifactorial disorders respond to music. He also stresses that the patient should have a final choice on the form of music as then only will he or she be interested in undergoing the therapy sessions. He, however feels that structured musical compositions (e.g., songs) would be therapeutically more effective than unstructured alaps or alapanas.

For Dr. (Ms.) M. Suryakumari, who has specialized in paediatrics and neonatology and who had learnt kirtanas of Saint Annamacharya, music therapy can be recommended "to certain extent" to address depression, anxiety and hypertension in people. There is no need that the patients should have knowledge

about music. She doesn't find any raga or for that matter, any form of music as "non-therapeutic" and she recommends the "intake" of music "early morning, during eating, before going to bed, and at the time of taking medicine". According to her, the best mode of administering music is while relaxing or while lying on the bed. She feels that background knowledge of paediatrics is necessary for the music therapists, who should also have an adequate exposure to subjects such as musicology, general medicine, psychology, neurology and psychotherapy.

Based on the findings of the survey, Nada Centre for Music Therapy has chalked out a distance learning programme in music therapy. This programme, which can be followed sitting at a home computer, aims at turning out an army of music therapists in India in the near future! For there is an increasing need for addressing mind-related problems in infants, school children, teenagers, professionals and retired people in a gentle and effective way. Music alone promises this.

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READERSPEAK

The homage piece by V. Sivaramakrishnan on the legendary singer-devotee K. B. Sundarambal (KBS) in the April to June issue of "SHANMUKHA" revived nostalgic memories in me. I was introduced to Carnatic music in 1933 by my teachers as also music-minded friends. In younger years I was a fan of Kittappa and Sundarambal. KBS paired wonderfully well with famed S.G. Kittappa of "vengala thondai" (bell metal voice). I have enjoyed many a film where KBS played the main role. I have watched her television excerpts too. Only from Sivaramakrishnan's article I came to know the tragic life of SGK and KBS. KBS found life's meaning in music and Muruga bhakti. She is a torch bearer of the bhakti-suffused music of yester year. Her memories will live on to inspire future generations.

N. Hariharan

Senior Journalist

Ex-music Critic, Times of India, Mumbai.

Whenever I hear the kriti *Chakkani Raja* of Saint Thyagaraja in the raga Kharaharapriya, I am thrilled at the beauty of the raga and my mind travels back to the period 1952-1960. This kriti was first

sung by Sri Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer at the Music Academy's annual music conference in the year 1952 with elaborate alapana, niraval and swaraaprastharam which captivated the rasikas. Thereafter the kriti was performed on many more platforms and gained much popularity. I am reminded of a pleasant custom of the 1950s in the Tanjavur delta districts which I would like to share with all the rasikas / readers.

Whenever the marriages of daughters of rich landlords were being negotiated, it was a custom for the prospective bridegroom to interview the prospective bride. After the exchange of pleasantries, the bridegroom was wont to request the girl's father to ask her to sing the kriti *Chakkani Raja*. The charanam begins as "Kantiki Sundarataramagu Roopame". If the girl sang this line thrice with bashfulness, it indicated her consent to the marriage. Following this method, many marriages were finalized in the above period. Such was the power of this Kharaharapriya piece.

N. Srinivasan

Secretary, Indian Fine Arts Society, Chennai.

SABHA ROUNDUP

Annual Music, Dance & Drama Festival 9th-14th Oct 2009

By Nalini Dinesh



Sikkil Gurucharan

The six-day festival began with a brilliant vocal concert by Sikkil Gurucharan accompanied by Sanjeev on the violin, Neyveli Skandasubramanian on the mridangam and Alathur Rajaganesh on the kanjeera, unfazed by a long train and taxi journey, delayed due to rain. Gurucharan presented a good mix of fast and slow compositions and the highlight of his concert was his racy kalpana swaram. Bhairavi alapana teetered a little at a few places with some odd phrases. RTP in Kamalamanohari was a rushed affair, and the rendition of Dikshitar's *Amba Neelaayataakshi* would have been much more effective if he hadn't had to refer to a book for sahyam.

Hema Malini's dance ballet Draupadi drew in the crowds as usual on the second day, while the third day featured Pandit Jasraj's Hindustani vocal recital.



Sanjay Subramaniam

Sanjay Subramaniam's rather bewildering concert on the fourth day left a mixed reaction among the audience. The flashes of his brilliance, were tempered (or spiced up, depending on how one looked at it) by eccentricities in the mode of singing alapana, neraval and kalpana swaram. For this writer at least, just as one relaxed into enjoying his outstanding raga phrases, one was jolted by over-the-top sound productions (for lack of a better phrase). Sanjay sang a brilliant alapana of Kannada followed by a Swati Tirunal kriti *Kalayami Hrudhi*. Other major items were Thyagaraja's kriti *Venkatesha* in Madhyamavati and RTP in Charukesi. The Tamil pallavi had the simple and sweet lyrics *Kuzhalinidu yaazhinidu enbaar tam makkal mazhalai chol keladavar* (People who haven't ever heard the prattle of little children say that the flute and veena sound sweet).

The festival drew to a light-hearted close with two Tamil plays, *IPL Kudumbam* and *Plastic Kadavul* by T.V. Varadarajan's United Visuals troupe from Chennai.

Dance Festival 13th-16th Nov 2009

By Jyothi Mohan

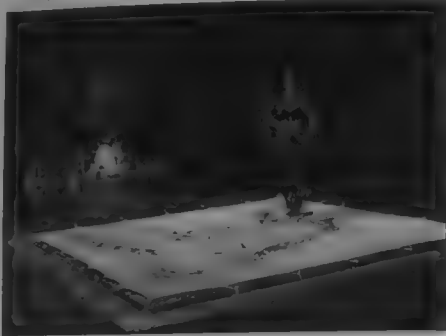
The dance festival featured the artistes of three institutions. On the first day, the Rajarajeshwari Bharatanatyam Kala Mandir, Mumbai, presented Skanda Leela-a dance drama choreographed by Guru Kalyanasundaram. Episodes from the Kanda Purana, were depicted through verses from Tiruppugazh and other compositions. The stories were connected to the six abodes of Lord Muruga-the *aaru padai veedu*.

Beginning with their salutations to Lord Ganesha, the dancers went on to describe how Brahma was at the receiving end when he failed to explain the Pranava Mantra to young Muruga. The episode, wherein, young Muruga explains the meaning of Om to his father brought forth spontaneous applause. The story of the contest triggered off by Narada, of Ganesha being the winner by virtue of his intelligence and devotion prompting an irate Kartikeya to retire to Palani was well appreciated. *Agaram Aagi* describing the dialogue between the wise old Avvai and young Muruga was laced with humour. Vanquishing demon Soorapadman and the wedding of Muruga and Devayani were the episodes at Tiruchendur that were portrayed.

The concluding scene in which Lord Muruga woos Valli and weds her was greatly appreciated by the audience.

Nattuvangam was by the inimitable Guru K. Kalyanasundaram and Guru Vasant Kumar. Smt. Vidya Harikrishna's mellifluous versatile voice earned applause for her very emotive singing. They were ably supported

on the mridangam by Guru Harikrishna. The contribution of the other talented members of the orchestra added lustre to the performance.



Ananda Shankar Jayant performing Simhanandini

On November 14th Ananda Shankar Jayant presented mixed fare. The first half was a thematic offering entitled Navarasas-Expressions of Life. The entry of the dancers with a sash in the colour ascribed to a particular rasa, nritya suitable to the mood, in the chosen raga and well-synchronised movements were the high points of the recital. But the overtone of aggressiveness was a bit jarring. In the second half, Ananda Shankar Jayant performed Simhanandini in the Kuchipudi tradition. Earlier this used to be performed in front of the temple chariot on Vijayadashami day. The artiste while dancing to the song, eulogising Devi, would create a picture of the ferocious lion through the movement of her feet on a white cloth over coloured rangoli powder. As many in the audience were watching this for the very first time their excitement was palpable. Ananda drew a ferocious face of a lion with her dancing feet to the poetry of Rallabandi Kavita Prasad.

Nattuvangam was by Renuka Prasad and vocal rendering was by Venu Madhav. They were ably supported by T. P. Balasubramaniam on the mridangam, Sai Kumar on the violin and Shrikant handling percussion. Purna Chandrashekar was competent with stage and lights.

Nrtya Tarangini

By Dr. Suman Badami



A scene from Nrtya Tarangini

After a gap of 25 years the Dhananjayans performed at Shanmukhananda auditorium on 15th Nov. The Dhananjayans with their students presented 'Nrtya Tarangini'- a visual treat for all art lovers gathered there that evening.

The term Bharatanatyam has been used in earlier works about 200 years ago in the dance dramas composed by the Mahratta kings of Tanjore. As the traditional art form of South India is now a symbol of Indian culture with a national identity Sri Dhananjayan felt it should be called Bhaarata natyam - the only dance form that derives its name from its motherland. It was very fitting then that the evening's program commenced with a brisk Deepanjali in which the students of the Dhananjayans,

danced to the lyrics of Vande Mataram.

The Nrtya aspect was presented in the 'Nrtya Swaravali' a composition of T.V. Gopalakrishnan with mnemonics from the ancient text of Nandikeshwara, the Bharatarnava and in the concluding tillana, in Kuntalavaraali, a composition of Dr. Balamuralikrishna. Shri Dhananjayan shared an interesting anecdote that in the 60's this Thillana was termed as controversial by most dancers and it was the Dhananjayans who were the first to present it on stage. He also voiced his opinion on the term Thillana as being a musical term and while presented with dance it would be more suitable to call it 'Nrtya angahaara'. The items presented with effortless grace had complex rhythmic patterns with some very unique and beautiful combinations of movements.

The beauty and wonder of the celestial dance of Shiva was brought out well by the dancers in the Swati Tirunal composition 'Shankara Shri Giri'. The dancers were also able to display their skill in abhinaya in the famous composition of Arunachala Kavirayar *En palli kondeerayya* in praise of Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam while depicting the episodes about Rama and Krishna.

The Tulsidas Bhajan 'Ram charana sukha dayi' about the joy of surrendering to the lotus feet of Rama was brought out with great depth and intensity of bhava by Sri Dhananjayan. The mood of Bhakti he evoked through the depiction of the stories of the curse of Ahalya, the joy of the boatman Guha and the reverence of Bharata for the sandals of Rama was further enhanced by the mellifluous singing of Shri

Shashidharan.

The third aspect of dance-Natya- the dramatic element was brought out in the central piece of the evening's performance by the Dhananjayans. This was an episode from the Ramayana-Shri Rama Pattabhishekha Bhanga. The high caliber of the artists and their complete mastery over the art form was evident in this item. Smt. Shanta Dhananjayan gave a very riveting performance as the scheming hunch back, Kooni, who convinces Kaikeyi (played by Divya Shivashankar) to make her harsh demands. Sri Dhananjayan was dignity personified in his portrayal of the noble Dasharatha - a man of integrity who cannot go back on his promise to his favourite queen and a shattered father tormented at the very thought of parting from his son.

The impressive orchestral line up with Smt Shanta Dhananjayan wielding the cymbals supported by Sri Shashidharan and Smt Vanathi Raghuraman (vocals), Ramesh Babu (mridangam) and Kalaiarasan (violin) all added luster to the spectacular presentation.

It was a delight to watch the refined performance of the Dhananjayans and the vigour and energy of their very talented group of students- Pavitra Srinivasan, Gopu Kiran, Divya Shivasundar, Uttiya Barua, Kirthi Panikker, Venkatakrishnan and Vijnna Vasudevan.

Shakti Prabhavam and Bhakti Pravaaham

By Jyothi Mohan

On 16th November, Sri V. P. Dhananjayan's Bharata Kalanjali presented two thematic

works- Shakti Prabhavam and Bhakti Pravaaham.

Shakti Prabhavam based on Mahakavi Subramanya Bharati's Mata Parashakti, paid obeisance to Shakti in her myriad forms. The refreshing choreography for the dances depicting the panchabhootas was received well by the rasikas. The imaginative way in which the dancers took on the roles of Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati came in for a lot of appreciation. The dancing was of a very high standard showcasing the best of Kalakshetra tradition. The azhuttam with inherent grace and lyrical beauty was a sheer treat for the eyes. In place of the customary interval, Sri Dhananjayan offered to do a duet with wife Shanta, on popular demand. This was greeted with a strong round of approval from the audience. He apologized for donning the role of Krishna, dressed as he was to portray Nandanar-a Shaivite, in the programme to follow. What unfolded was sheer magic-we were transported to another world of charm and grace! Radha sets off in search of her beloved Krishna with great eagerness only to discover him revelling in the company of other gopis. In anger, Radha chides Krishna for his dalliance. Shanta's portrayal captured the anguish of Radha, couched in anger, very poignantly. Her dignified sorrow laced with barbs of anger was moving. Dhananjayan as the repentant Krishna stole the hearts of the audience with his wooing of Radha seriously on one hand and conspiring with the audience on the other! The twinkle in his eye assuring us that she would come around, being at the same time penitent, while addressing her, captured the eternal

love of Radha and the mischievous Krishna. There was scarcely a dry eye in the audience as they went through *Yahi Madhava* and *Priye Charusheele*. After winning over Radha, he tenderly left the stage with her and just before the final exit, looked over his shoulder with a triumphant conspiratorial smile which had the audience in splits! The musicians improvised equally beautifully as this impromptu drama unfolded. The perfect understanding between all the artistes was very commendable. A love story of Radha and Krishna played by a couple in their sixties, in such a convincing, ethereal manner, with such finesse, was truly a treat from heaven.



A scene from Ashtapadi enacted by Dhananjayan & Shanta Dhananjayan

After that visual delight of Radha-Krishna still dancing before our eyes, I wondered how Nandanar's anguish would continue to hold audience interest. But Dhananjayan lived the role with such conviction that we were transported to an era in which exploitation of lower castes by the higher castes was the norm.

Bhakti Pravaaham commenced with a lively

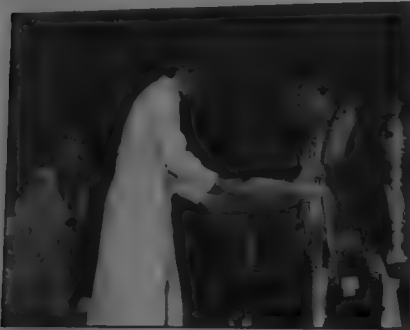
Yellorum vaarungal, in which Nandanar gathers all his village folk, exhorting them to drop everything and join him in the journey to see Lord Shiva. The enthusiasm of the simple Nandanar was captured beautifully by Dhananjayan. His distress at being unable to have a glimpse of his favorite Lord, as Nandi was obstructing his view, was emotively brought out in *Vazhi maraittirukkude*. Here, I must mention the role of M.Venkatakrishnan. As the idol of Nataraja in the temple, he stood without even a trace of movement, in a perfect stance like a statue, through the entire rendering of the song. Dhananjayan's alternate anger and pleading done with great restraint which continued in *Chatre vilagiyirum pillai* that followed, was heart-rending. While portraying Nandanar's pleas to the haughty, insensitive Brahmin landlord, played very convincingly by Gopu Kiran, Dhananjayan's obsequious behavior befitting a low-born were very realistic. In *Varugalaamo Aiyya*, Dhananjayan excelled himself. The eagerness to see the Lord in the Chidambaram temple while being assailed by doubts about the propriety of his entering the temple, being an untouchable, was brought home to the audience in a telling manner. His ecstasy at finally being able to rest his eyes on the Lord and his becoming one with Him was portrayed beautifully. Indeed, he brought home to the emotionally-charged audience, the message of Gopalakrishna Bharati loud and clear-that all are equal in the eyes of the Lord. Nandanar Charitram ended with the group presenting *Kanakasabhai tiru natanam* in Surutti.

The excellent orchestral support

contributed greatly to the presentation. Shanta Dhananjayan's nattuvangam reflecting quiet dignity, Vanathi Raghuraman's bhava-laden exquisite singing, Kalaiarasan's evocative violin and Ramesh Babu's excellent mridangam touches won the appreciation of the Sabha audience.

Mahaswami Sangeetanjali 21st Dec., 2009

By Nalini Dinesh



Shri R. K. Padmanabha being honoured during Mahaswami Sangeethanjali

The Sangeethanjali to Sri Chandrashekharendra Saraswati was offered this year by veteran vocalist from Bangalore Sri R.K. Padmanabha, accompanied by Sri C.N. Chandrashekhara on the violin, Sri V. Cheluvareja on the mridangam and Sri M. A. Krishnamurthy on the ghatam.

The evening began with an Arul Urai by Sri Jayendra Saraswati Swamikal who spoke about Upavedas of the Vedas; Ayurveda being the upaveda of Rig Veda and Sangeeta shastra being the upaveda of Sama Veda and the Mahaswami's love for

music and his deep knowledge of the art.

The recital began with the Mohanam varnam *Ninnukori*; though basic, it did manage to set the mood for the recital to follow. The Dikshitar kriti *Gajanana yutam* in Chakravaakam followed with thunderous, almost bellowing kalpana swarams. *Mokshamu Galada* had a couple of novelties in that the vocalist did a small taanam while giving karvai at Veena vadana, in order to evoke the image of the veena better; he also used the phrase Sangeeta Gynaana Viheenaulaku Mokshamu Galadaa effectively as the refrain at the beginning and end of the song. A short Poorvikalyani alapana was followed by taanam.

The vocalist demonstrated about nine varieties of taanam including Manodharma taanam, Naabhi taanam (very deep and powerful, mostly in mandra sthaayi), Mayura taanam (characterized by small daatu phrases and not many gamakas), Markata taanam (big daatu and vakra phrases at a much faster pace evoking the gait of a monkey), Ghanta taanam (consisting of a lot of nananana... sounds, to denote the ringing of a bell), Shankha taanam (resembling the sound of a conch), Ashwa taanam (phrases resembled the cantering of a horse like D, SS D, SS...), Bhiringa taanam (resembling buzzing of a bee) and Shankara taanam, which was in tisra nadai to resemble the taandava of Shiva.

Verses from the beautiful Shaaradaabhujangaashtakam composed by Adi Shankaracharya, beginning with Jwalat Kaanti Vahnim were rendered with felicity in Sahana, Anandabhairavi, Kalyani,

Kambhoji, Dhanyasi, Begada, Kharaharapriya and Revati.

Sri Shanmukhananda National Eminence Award

By Jyothi Mohan



Dr. R. K. Srikantan being conferred the National Eminence Award

The Sri Shanmukhananda National Eminence Lifetime Achievement Award was conferred upon Dr. R. K. Srikantan, the doyen of Carnatic music, on 26th Dec 2009.

Shri V. Shankar, President of the sabha paid rich tributes to Dr. Srikantan, who has served the cause of music for nearly seven decades. He felt, the parents of the maestro, had chosen a very appropriate name for their son as he has been blessed, indeed, by a rich voice that has captivated listeners all over the world. He also felt that the young musicians, who would be receiving their Sangeetha Shiromani awards in the presence of the living legend, would consider that in itself as a great award. It would also be an inspiration to them, to work with integrity and dedication, to achieve the status of the senior vidwan one day and deserve the Sabha's

Eminence Award. The citation was read out before being presented to him. The award consisted of a purse of Rs. one lakh, a shawl, and an icon of Shanmukha. A petha and the lifetime patronship of the Sabha were also presented to him. His wife was honoured with a shawl and a sari. Responding to the honours, Dr. Srikantan thanked the President and members of the managing committee for bestowing upon him such respect and honour. He paid glowing tributes to the sabha. He felt that the country is paying the price for neglecting to give importance to music. He felt that classical music was necessary to improve the social fabric of society and that it transcends the borders of meaningless entertainment. He stressed that music is the essence of life and one had to work at it constantly as perfection is a journey, not a destination.

The Sangeetha Shiromani awards were conferred on Shri Embar Kannan, for Carnatic Violin, to Abhishek Raghuram for Carnatic vocal and to Bhuvan Komkali for Hindustani Vocal. The award consisted of a purse of Rs. 25000, a shawl, and an icon of Shanmukha.

The award function was followed by a brief concert of Dr. Srikantan. But in that short period, Dr. Srikantan presented a power-packed capsule of chaste, traditional music which left the audiences asking for more! The power in the voice belied his 89 years (he will turn 90 in Jan we were told) and till the last note shruti and volume were both steadfast!

He began with the daru varnam in Kamas-Maate Malayadwaja, rendered in his usual erudite manner. This was followed by a

spirited *Shakti Ganapatim* in Naattai, a composition of Muthiah Bhagavathar. Brisk swaras added lustre to the rendition. An elaborate exposition of Pantuvaraali by both Dr. Srikantan and his son Ramakanth, followed by a very evocative violin reply by Embar Kannan, was the high point of the concert. *Shiva Shiva* was sung with verve and the neraval and swarams were scholarly. The short tani by Rajesh & Shaktidharan was appreciated by the maestro. The Kaapi that followed had lovely delicate shades and it was further embellished by Embar Kannan. Purandarasa's *Narajanma bandaga* in this raagam was a treat. His exploration of Sindhuhairavi with all its different hues was echoed with great finesse by Embar Kannan. The devaranama that followed was sung with great enthusiasm. A lively tillana in Shankarabharanam, *Mangalam Kosalendraya* in Keeravani and later *Madhyamavati*, followed by *Pavamaana* marked the end of a very short but satisfying concert by the living legend.

Exactly 2 years ago, I had interviewed Dr. Srikantan at the sabha, after the Mahaswami Sangeetanjali that he had presented on 24th Dec 2007. The same sharp twinkling eyes, the gentle smile and old-world courtesy were in evidence! The voice had the same quality and he sat erect, without a trace of any strain all through the concert, enjoying every minute of it. An inspiration for all of us!

Bhajana Mahotsava - Tyagarasa

The annual Bhajana Mahotsava this year featured a Bharatanatyam presentation of Tyagaraja's kritis by Shobhana Balachandar on 30th Dec 2009. She chose



Shobhana Balachandar

to depict the Navarasas through the compositions rendered exquisitely by Smt. Radha Badri. Indeed, the dancer and the vadya vrindam succeeded in weaving a magic spell on the audience.

A prelude in Bilahari saw Shobhana entering the stage, with a round of dignified nritta to the beautiful swara passages. This paved the way for *Dorakuna itu vanti seva* which she used for showing the Adbhuta rasa. In this the poet is overcome by the fact, that though he has hardly deserved it, he is able to visualize The Lord in all his splendour. He is able to behold the wondrous scene of Lord Rama with Sita by his side as he rocks the golden swing while he is singing. *Etula brotuvu* was the kriti through which Shobhana conveyed Bhibhatsa. In this, Thyagaraja is disgusted with himself. He feels he has wasted his life in chasing unworthy goals without a thought of worshipping Rama. He loathes himself and wonders how he can now ask for His protection. The sancharis showing his petty behaviour were very telling. The kriti *Ramabhi Rama* in Darbar, Chapu talam, was chosen to portray Srngara Rasa. This was choreographed like a varnam with

crisp jathis interspersed between the lyrics. The poet's longing for Rama was depicted as bhakti-sublime love. He longs to be Sita, to be able to serve Him with love and affection. He longs to be a dasa like Hanuman or Lakshmana so that he can serve him unconditionally. O lord with the sweet name, I think only of you, yet you do not show any compassion towards me, he complains. For Roudra rasa, Shobhana chose the famous Shankarabharanam kriti-*Eduta nilachite*. Thyagaraja is very angry with Lord Rama. If you appear before me, will all your material wealth disappear, he asks angrily. Knowing fully well that I do not approach any other God, you choose to be indifferent to me. Is that fair, he demands to know. Is your heart immovable like a stone or are you like a rock with no feelings, he wants to know. Oh, yes, worshippers you have in plenty. Is that why you disregard me? Is that valour? Even the asuras will not approve of this he declares. The despair and anger was brought out very effectively. Hasya was evoked by a humorous delineation of *Sita Nayaka* in Reetigowlai. The excellent raga sketch by veteran violinist T.K. Padmanabhan must be mentioned here. Thyagaraja sets off in search of the elusive Rama. He wonders- did you run off to the top of the hill to become Venkateswara to avoid the persistent demands from devotees? Or have you transformed yourself into Vamana to evade favour-seeking devotees? Have you, perchance joined the band of monkeys, to throw your devotees who are attracted by your majestic form, off track? The hasyam depicted, of different types, was very aesthetic and done with great finesse. Bhayanaka was depicted as the

fear of the gopis in Nauka Charitram through the song *Unna tavuna* in ragam Ghanta. *Shara shara samaraika* in Kuntalavarali was the choice for displaying Veera rasa. While eulogising Him, the stances of Lord Rama, that she employed, were arresting. Karunyam came through in *Enduku dayaraadura* in Todi. The composer asks Rama -have you forgotten me in the jubilation of your victory? Why are you not bestowing your grace on me? You are my only refuge. One glance of yours is enough for me, he pleads. The delicate nuances in music were matched by exquisitely subtle abhinaya. Shanta rasa was added later to the ashta rasas in vogue, thus making the navarasa. This came through effectively in the delineation of *Shantamu leka* in the raga Sama that evokes Shanta rasa. Beautiful swarams to which Shobhana danced, employing various combinations of mandi adavus spoke of her stamina and hardwork.

To be able to savour soulful music matched sangati for sangati by subtle abhinaya & dignified nritta is a rarity these days! There was variety in the nritta and the covering of the stage was done dextrously without any frenzied jumping around, which most dancers these days resort to! Smt. Neela Sukanya's nattuvangam was a delight to the ears. Smt. Radha Badri's voice with its wide range and inherent bhava captivated the audience as much as the natyam did. Violinist T.K. Padmanabhan's evocative raga essays embellished the recital. Ramesh Babu provided excellent mridangam support. This lovely synthesis of dance & music ensured it was an evening well-spent. □

HAPPENINGS AT THE VIDYALAYA

by Nalini Dinesh

VAGGEYAKARA DAY CELEBRATIONS

MUTHUSWAMY DIKSHITAR DAY 24th
Oct 2009

Students of Smt. Hemalatha Veeramani

Smt. Hemalatha Veeramani's students Radhika Ganesh, Renuka Ganesh, G. Srivarshini, G. Varsha and Meera Kumar presented a recital of rare compositions of Dikshitar. It was a commendable effort on the part of such young students and a very good effort by the guru in preparing them for the stage. The recital began with *Panchamatanga* in Malahari and *Nagalingam* in Shankarabharanam (whose setting had the essence of the raga well-portrayed). A pleasant rendition of *Neelothpalambikaya* in Mayamalava gowla was followed by *Neelaachala Natham* in Sumadyuti. Radhika sang a short Sumadyuti alapana. Sama raagam was presented well in *Tripura Sundari*. The recital was concluded with *Sri Ramachandra* (with a short raga sketch by Renuka Ganesh) in Sriranjani and *Anjananeyam*, a nottu swaram in

Shankarabharanam.

An enjoyable veena recital by Gayatri Govindarajan followed. The programme consisted of weighty well-loved kritis of Dikshitar like *Annapoorne*, *Maamava Pattabhirama*, *Shree Krishnam Bhajamanasa* (preceded by a very good, brief sketch of Todi and taanam) and the *Kamalamba navavarana kriti* in Sahaana. However, the experience was marred by a few aberrations – for instance, in the very classical Manirangu kriti a western-sounding phrase was used as a filler between sangatis. Other instances were the flat nishadam and gandharam in Todi, usage of the alien swaram, saadharana gandharam in the Sahaana rendition and the setting of the Sahaana kriti in Misra Chaapu, which was at odds with the original Tisra Triputa structure as created by Dikshitar.

Parvati Shankaranarayanan presented the final recital of the day. The opener was *Swaminatha Paripaalaya* in Nattai followed by the Navagraha kriti dedicated to Shaneeshwara *Diwakara Tanujam* in Yadukula Kambhoji. The ending of the pallavi line had an odd SRGS,,, usage which sounded very like Kedaram. *Maamava Meenakshi* was preceded by a sketch of Varaali. The vocalist would do well to avoid splitting of single words like Vi-jaya, Meena-kshi and Pra-taapini (the hyphen indicates where the word was split). *Harihara Putram Shastaaram* in Vasanta and *Veera Hanumathe Namō Namō* in Kaanada

preceded by a creditable raga sketch rounded off the recital. There was a distinct Darbaari touch in one of the sangatis of pallavi.

Pranav Natarajan provided violin support for the vocalists and Prasanna Kumar accompanied the vocalists and vainika on the mrudangam. Prasanna's mrudangam literally sang the compositions along with the main artistes.

The programme was compered by Smt. Praveena Gouthaman.

S. Seshadri Memorial Talent Exposure
Concert 20th Nov. 2009Veena recital by Kum. Varsha accompanied by
Master Gautam Narayan on Mrudangam

Varsha began her veena recital with the Saaveri varnam *Sarasooda* by Kottavaasal Venkatrama Iyer in two speeds. Her tonal quality was good, and even in the higher speed there were no errors in swara sthaanams. This was followed by an Aabhogi composition of Gowri Shankar Stapathi *Guruvarulum*. This was followed by *Nada tanum anisham* in Chitta Ranjani and a Purandaradasar devaranama *Smarane Onde* in Malayamarutam. The main piece was Muthuswamy Dikshitar's

Kaamaakshi Kamakoti in Sumadyuti. Varsha played a short alapana and neat kalpana swaram. *Shara shara samaraika* in Kuntalavaraali and a nottu swaram in Behag raagam concluded the concert. Behag raagam wasn't very evident in the nottu swaram.

Aniruddh's vocal recital followed. The Bhairavi Ata tala varnam was followed by Meenakshi Sutar's *Smaraamyaham* in Vachaspati and the main piece in Keeravani *Narayana Nagasayana* of Harikesanallur Muthaiah Bhagavata. Anirudh attempted neraval and kalpanaswaram for this kriti. The recital ended with Rajaji's *Kurai Ondrum Illai* and Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar's tillaana in Kaanada. Anirudh's deep interest in music should motivate him to put in rigorous practice to attain excellence in all aspects of singing including shruti alignment, voice culture, gamakas and effective kriti rendition.

Mahakavi Subramanya Bharatiyar Day &
Scholarship Awards 19th Dec. 2009

Scholarship Awards for 2008 – 2009 were distributed to deserving students by Shri

Disciples of Smt. Muthulakshmi Vedanarayanan
presenting "Bharatiyum Bhaktiyum"

V.S. Amarnath Sury (Convenor).

The award function was followed by the sangeetanjali to Mahakavi Subramanya Bharatiyar which was held in association with Bharati Medical & Research Foundation under the theme *Bharatiyum Bhaktiyum*. The vocalists who participated were Bhanu Ramani, Vijaya Krishnan, Vidya Ramani, Divya Ranganath, Swati, Jaya, Lata Ramaswamy, Jamuna Rajgopal and Raji Raju. They are students of Smt Muthulakshmi Vedanarayanan whose commendable effort made this thematic programme possible. The team was provided good support by Valli Shivakumar on the keyboard, Chyndhri Padmanabhan on the violin and K. Raghavan on the mridangam. The invocation to Lord Ganapati was the folksy *Om Shakti Om Shakti Om* in tisra nadai. A ragamalika

Sollavallayo Kiliye was followed by another folk number, a kavadi chindu *Villina othha puruvam*. The popular *Vellai Taamarai*, set unusually to Saraswati raagam, a ragamalika *Malarin mevu*, *Kaali Valliya* in Aabheri and *Ujjaini nitya kalyani* in Kalyani followed. *Solladi sivasakti* in Simhendramadhyamam was rendered well. One of the few Sanskrit compositions of Bharatiyar *Dehi mudam dehi* was presented in Kamaas raagam. *Mangiyathor* in Desh, an effective rendition of *Saagaavaram taruvaai* in Pantuvaraali, *Kaakkai Siraginile* in Maand, the familiar *Teeratha Vilayattu Pillai* (with all the ragas rendered well) and *Etthanai Kodi Inbam* in Madhyamavati brought up the rear of the programme.

The programme was compered by Parvati Shankaranarayanan. □



SRI SHANMUKHANANDA KANCHI MAHASWAMI SANGEETHA SANGRAHAALAY

Summary of the Archives

December 2009

	Carnatic	Hindustani	Total
Concerts	9,827	1,632	11,459
Duration	22,006 hours	3,450 hours	25,456 hours
Tracks	82,987	10,288	93,275
Size	1,237.4 GB	194.2 GB	1,431.6 GB
Classifications	270	323	593
Main Artistes Covered	876 Artistes	335 Artistes	1,211 Artistes
Accompanists Covered	1,083 Artistes	116 Artistes	1,199 Artistes
Venues / Sabhas Covered	296	41	337
Cities Covered	160	43	203
Years Covered	1928 to 2009	1935 to 2009	1928 to 2009

Tracks Format	MP3 44.1 Khz. 128 kbps Stereo 16 bit
Tag	ID3 Tag Version 1.1 and Version 2.2

SUMMARY OF VIDEOS

Classification	Videos	Tracks	Size
Carnatic	1,328	2,439	829.3 GB
Hindustani	241	394	124.7 GB
Devotional	1,334	1,677	433.3 GB
Dance	209	397	118.8 GB
All	3,112	4,907	1506.3 GB

TOTAL SIZE OF ARCHIVES

Carnatic Archives (Audio)	1237.4 GB
Hindustani Archives (Audio)	194.2 GB
Videos - All	1506.3 GB
Total	2937.8 GB



Sri Shanmukhananda

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